



Greg Burk: Everyone Should Be Present

By [Paul Olson](#)



Pianist Greg Burk first came to listeners' attention during his tenure with Russ Gershon's Either/Orchestra, appearing on their *Afro-Cubism* and *Neo-Modernism* albums while simultaneously releasing his own CDs *Checking In* and *Carpe Momentum*. This year has seen Burk do the almost impossible: in a jazz world crowded with superstar pianists, he's put out the best piano trio album of 2005, *Nothing, Knowing*, a remarkable session with electric bassist Steve Swallow and drummer Bob Moses. On it, Burk takes his interest in free, rubato playing to a new and unique musical place that really needs to be heard to be appreciated. The formerly Boston-based Burk has relocated to Rome, where I spoke with him about the new CD, his explorations into rubato, his final recording with the Either/Orchestra *Live in Addis* (also released this year) and more.

All About Jazz: You've got three albums so far under your name: *Checking In*, which is a trio session on Soul Note, *Carpe Momentum*, a quartet record also on Soul Note, and your new trio album *Nothing, Knowing*, which is just out on the 482 Music label. For me, listening to these records chronologically is interesting because I can hear your fascination with rubato, open, improvised playing grow and develop with each album. There's excellent music on all three albums, but the openness in tempo and structure does increase with each one and it really culminates with *Nothing, Knowing*--which isn't to say there's no composed or structured music in it. I love this new record and can't help but feel this one is a real breakthrough for you, that you've sort of found your path. Tell me what interests you about this kind of open, rubato playing.

Greg Burk: Well, rubato playing is something I've always done in my practicing and I think it's because I come from a family of classical musicians. Especially opera--I heard a lot of opera growing up. My father's a conductor; my mother's an opera singer. And that kind of *melody above all*, and the way the music can shift following a drama, following the story, basically--the music is serving the story and the melody is always out front. So I think exposure to that kind of music really made an imprint on me that took a while to emerge because it took me a long time to get a handle on the basics of jazz playing and trying to adopt an identity like that takes a lot of work, but obviously the other interest in rubato playing was always there. I didn't give it much importance until I started recording it and hearing it back [laughing]. It was a real revelation! I started doing that when I was a student at NEC [New England Conservatory] with [Paul] Bley; my last lesson with him was in the studio--I just played two hours of free music with Bley right there. Fortunately, he's a really humorous and light guy when he wants to be and it wasn't a pressure situation.

AAJ: You'd established a relationship by that point. It wasn't an audition.

GB: Right. And believe it or not, I'd only heard his trio records. I hadn't heard any of the solo records, so I didn't even know what I would be doing if I had wanted to imitate him. So I did the free playing and I connected with it instantly; it made perfect sense to me. Whereas listening back to myself playing tunes, standards--it was always like the shadow of Herbie Hancock.

AAJ: Well, he casts a long shadow.

GB: A very long shadow. Rightfully so, but it was frustrating, really. I didn't feel like I could bring *all* of my music into that context. And I needed a different context to access whole parts of my musical identity and heritage--whatever was there, but wasn't on a II-V-I [laughing]. [Drummer] Bob [Moses] was key in that, too, because he's really into rubato playing for that reason: it changes the way you hear what you're doing because there's, at least in my experience in rubato playing, more time to reflect on what you've done and what needs to come next. It tends to make me play with more of a dramatic curve to the improvisation. Bob was a big influence on me to pursue that, because he recognized that; he said, "Cowell, man, that's your best stuff. Or at least that's the stuff that's most specifically *you*."

AAJ: Speaking of Bob--you're playing with Bob Moses on drums and Steve Swallow on electric bass on this album. After hearing it, it's hard for me to imagine this material being played by a different group. They're so ideal for this music, they're so fearless, and they're so attuned to each other and you. Moses played on your first record, but as a pair they have a huge history as a rhythm section. Did you prepare or compose this material before you knew who you were working with or did you write it with them in mind?

GB: Half and half. Some of the tunes, like "Old Souls" and "Blink to Be," are tunes of mine I wrote at least ten years ago. Other tunes I wrote the week of [the session], and a large portion we just made in the studio with no preparation. I definitely had them in mind. Swallow is such a melody player, it's amazing. Even his basslines, they function as basslines and they provide that momentum, but the melodic shape and interest in them is pretty unique. And Bob is all over that; he's a melodic drummer. I wanted to create a context that was about everybody and really wasn't about me as much as it was about what we could do together. Even though I hadn't played with Steve before the recording. We had been in contact for a couple years and wanted to collaborate, but we hadn't played before. But it didn't really matter because it was easy for me to conceptualize how they were going to react to the material I brought in, and I was familiar with their music--so it fell right into place.

AAJ: One of my two favorites on the new CD is the album opener, "Old Souls." Maybe I like it so much because it seems like the perfect blend of that rubato, open side of your work and the structured side as well. I also love the way that it begins in a relatively open fashion, albeit around that bass vamp. But there's a sort of coalescing to it, a sense of coming together, almost like a flower slowly opening its petals. It takes two minutes for you to begin playing the real melody of the song. Tell me about this one.

GB: Well, I wrote the tune when I was living in Detroit. I lived there for two years. It's funny, because the tune is so melodic and open, but at the time I was studying and playing bebop.



AAJ: Itâ€™s not a bop tune.

GB: Itâ€™s not a bop tune. But we recorded that tune three or four times and each version is completely different and I think the version that I chose was just for the reason that you said, that it unfolds so--well, itâ€™s not forced. Thereâ€™s nothing forced about it. Weâ€™re very much in tune with the way that weâ€™re phrasing together and feeling the cadences. Steve plays the melody on it so beautifully. Youâ€™re right, it does kind of sum up what I had in mind for the recording because thereâ€™s material there--Iâ€™ve played that tune and it sound completely different, but the material is just serving this approach to be as together as we can. Everyone should be *present*. I didnâ€™t just want Swallow to play the bass notes and Bob to just play some time.

The melody is really simple; itâ€™s kind of one phrase that gets moved through a set of changes. But through the evolution of the changes and the way the melody builds, thereâ€™s a story, and that was what I was trying to access through the way we approached the tune: what is this melody, where does it come from, and what is it trying to say? Like I said, I wrote the tune when I was living and playing a completely different kind of music, but that was part of the revelation of playing rubato: that there was a whole other side of melody that was there but didnâ€™t come through in a changes situation.

AAJ: Swallowâ€™s bass is fantastic on that song, and when I play it on my car stereo, it makes my doors rattle and hum sympathetically. John Weston engineered this and you and he mixed it together. The CDâ€™s got a very good mix.

GB: Thank you. Bob participated on a few mixing sessions. I spent a lot of time mixing it because the room is a very special room. Itâ€™s an old Masonic temple with very high ceilings; we were all in the same room and to play acoustic drums and piano in the same room is a challenge, mixing-wise--especially because Bobâ€™s drumset is so vast. Heâ€™s got two bass drums, two snares, two high-hats. And his sound is huge. The only way we were really able to do that was because Steve was playing electric bass. That enabled us to play in the same room. So, yeah, we mixed it--John Weston is a fantastic engineer. I had worked with him on mixing and mastering other projects, but hadnâ€™t recorded in his studio until this project. Heâ€™s got a Steinway that was the Steinway reserved for Claudio Arrau, the great classical pianist--for when he played on NBC. Itâ€™s a really unique, beautiful Steinway.

AAJ: Itâ€™s a fantastic-sounding piano.

GB: Oh, that alone is inspiration! [laughing] So, yeah, the mixing was a challenge. But I think each tune has a little bit of a different kind of a mix concept because I wanted to highlight certain things that might not have been apparent if there had just been a flat mix on the whole recording. And Steve Swallow on the electric bass--he can bring soul to electricity like nobody. Like a blues musician; they play electric instruments but thereâ€™s so much soul.

AAJ: Actually, I canâ€™t think of anyone that sounds like Swallow. On any instrument.



GB: Yeah. When I faced the possibility of making a new recording, I asked myself who I wanted to do this with because I have a working band and we recorded the week before this recording. That might be coming out later, but that recording came about completely different even though the material was similar--because they were different musicians. Thereâ€™s no way I could play the same with Moses and Swallow. Swallow was always somebody I wanted to play with because he was a key member of the projects that I was influenced by, like the [Jimmy] Giuffre trio, and Bleyâ€™s trio, especially. Of course his recordings as a leader, too, are fantastic. I always found myself wanting to hear more of him, though.

AAJ: Not an uncommon criticism. Sometimes people wish he would take more of a dominant role on his records.

GB: I think he was very interested in the writing aspect. Recently, he kind of tackles a different writing situation on each project--trio, quintet, I think heâ€™s doing something with a string quartet now. So I think thatâ€™s the reason. But I always found myself wanting to hear more bass solos, more bass in the mix. So that was part of why I wanted him. And heâ€™s still around! Thereâ€™s a lot of great musicians who I would love to have had an opportunity to play and record with, but

theyâ€™re not around. So with this opportunity to put together this dream trio--there was no reason not to do it.

AAJ: â€œPrelude to Surrenderâ€ is a solo piano piece. This one is very elusive to me; I like it very much but itâ€™s hard for me to describe or pin down. One part of it seemed like Debussy fused with stride piano. Over its six minutes, it changes in terms of content and style--itâ€™s like a subtle sort of suite where the sections morph and mutate. But it also seems improvised to me; how composed is it?

GB: Well, at the beginning of that piece I play a fragment of the melody that starts off the next piece, â€œTruth Be Bold.â€

AAJ: Ah, that was my next question.

GB: Yeah, itâ€™s an intro that I improvised to the 19-minute tune that follows it. They really were played in that order. I didnâ€™t decide I was going to do a solo piece. We were just playing and Bob laid out and Steve laid out--and I just played [laughing]. You know, that came at the end of two days of recording. We recorded almost *five CDs* worth of material. I mean, there are just hours and hours of stuff. And I donâ€™t think I was thinking anything at that point. Maybe it was a suite, because maybe I was reliving parts of the things we had done over the course of the two days, remembering them. Or I knew we were going to play this tune [â€œTruth Be Boldâ€] and itâ€™s kind of a special tune to me, so this was kind of a discarding all of the other ideas that I had in mind so I could play it as freshly as possible. I donâ€™t know exactly, but youâ€™re right, I do go through a lot of styles in a succession and they kind of lead to one another in a weird way. Itâ€™s kind of a mystery to me too, that tune [laughing].

I do a lot of solo playing, and I do a lot of recording; I used to record every six months in Boston--just go and record two, four hours of solo piano--and thatâ€™s where a lot of the rubato material comes from. Itâ€™s a process of discovering ideas that are either already there or are being developed as Iâ€™m discovering them, but itâ€™s composing as well. I donâ€™t really think of improvising as composing in the moment, like a lot of people do, because to me the key in an improvisation is the tension between the improviser and his or her material. So if that relationship is completely fresh, itâ€™s not like youâ€™re delving into some kind of information youâ€™ve accumulated. Then it creates a certain tension that to me is the real satisfaction in doing it. Composing is an out-of-time process, as it should be, because youâ€™re trying to distill an idea to its clearest expression. Whereas with improvising--I think of it as trying to bring the moment into focus. Youâ€™re trying to take the tension of what you want to say and what youâ€™re saying and bring them close together. You know, â€œTrane was a huge influence when I first started listening to jazz. And for me, thatâ€™s the power of his music: itâ€™s the process heâ€™s going through when heâ€™s playing that is so powerful. More than the content of whatâ€™s happening--which is fantastic as well.

AAJ: Yes, itâ€™s *okay*. Actually, I donâ€™t really hear any overt influences on this record. On the previous one, *Carpe Momentum*, I do feel I hear some McCoy Tyner and Coltrane.

GB: Yeah, definitely. Well, [sax player Jerry] Bergonzi was playing on that session; heâ€™s obviously listened to a lot of â€˜Trane. And when he would play things, it would spark and we would connect on that sort of idea there. But yeah, youâ€™re right. I feel that this is a more personal statement. *Carpe Momentum* is another record where itâ€™s a deliberate attempt to unite these two things--my inside playing and my outside playing, my rubato playing with my time playing--and see how many different ways I can try to put them together. And Bergonzi was the obvious choice for that, not just because I love playing with him. Like Swallow, heâ€™s got a whole side that you donâ€™t find on his records too often, so it was an opportunity to bring out that side of his music, too.

"I found that I had to write a song in one sitting. One or two at the most. Otherwise, it just became this weird, amorphous, tortured thing trying to find itself"

AAJ: I like that guy. I think he should be a bigger deal. But I havenâ€™t heard him so much in that outside context that you brought out on that session.

GB: Yeah, just rhythmically free. Itâ€™s funny, because rubato playing is a lot harder to do than it seems because itâ€™s easy for the music to feel lethargic. Either lethargic or hyperactive--itâ€™s hard to balance those two poles, for me anyways. And when I listen to a lot of rubato music, I feel it pulling towards those two poles. So itâ€™s hard to balance those two things, and the people I enjoy hearing do that are people that have played both sides, like Swallow, Moses, Bley. And Jarrett, Gary Peacock--a lot of people in the sixties. I mean, Freddie Hubbard played on [Coltraneâ€™s] *Ascension*. Itâ€™s like there are so many great musicians in the jazz world that donâ€™t play this way; what would Wynton Marsalis sound like playing rubato? Or a context like *Ascension*? Iâ€™m sure he would sound fantastic. But people are more attached now to their particular style, it seems. Maybe people were in the sixties, too, but but there were a lot of musicians doing both.



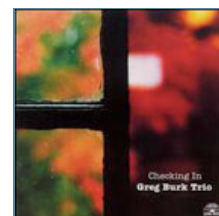
AAJ: Well, letâ€™s talk about â€˜Truth Be Bold.â€ I have already learned that you very much intended â€˜Prelude to Surrenderâ€ to precede â€˜Truth Be Bold.â€ â€˜Truth Be Boldâ€ is this enormous centerpiece to the album. Itâ€™s the most open, rubato piece, itâ€™s 19 minutes long and all three of you play fantastically on it, and for that matter, imaginatively. Is this completely improvised, and if so, is the improv linked by any sort of written material or cues?

GB: There *is* a written melody that the piece opens with that you can also hear a fragment of in the beginning of â€˜Prelude to Surrender.â€ And that melody itself was improvised on the duo record. Bob and I did a duo record and I played this melody; I improvised it. When we were mixing, Bob said, â€˜whoa, stop everything! Thatâ€™s a tune, go back!â€ [laughing] So I transcribed that from the improvisation and it became the head to that tune. Beyond that, itâ€™s all improvised.

Weâ€™re just trying to be in the moment, basically, to hear what everyone is doing and be fearless about playing what comes up to play. And the result, to me, is pretty magical--especially considering I hadnâ€™t played with Swallow before the session. But I knew we could connect. So yeah, itâ€™s all improvised and it was exactly the way it is on the record, and youâ€™re right--itâ€™s really the clearest and strongest expression of the rubato playing from the recording we did. Itâ€™s like a journey, 20 minutes of traveling, and I was following Steve and Bob as much as they were following me. It builds, it goes into delicate openings, it builds again, then there are new kinds of textures; it all moves very organically. And that was the goal, I suppose. We sort of hint at the melody again at the end, like you would playing a standard. Itâ€™s there, itâ€™s just not stated completely.

AAJ: Letâ€™s talk about my other favorite song on the album, â€˜Operetta.â€ Swallowâ€™s bass is so wonderful and is so contrapuntal to your piano that it feels like a tight-threaded duet between the two of you. In its rigor and richness of musical content, this piece feels so composed--and yet I donâ€™t think it is.

GB: No, that oneâ€™s not composed. Thereâ€™s a head, and thatâ€™s composed, but the rest is just sort of the shadow that the head casts. Thereâ€™s a vibe set up by the melody and we start by playing off of that vibe, trying to make a continuity so that thereâ€™s no separation between the head, that melody and its intent, and the improvisation. And then itâ€™s all improvised, and youâ€™re right--I was really attuned, and trying to tune in as much as I could, to what Swallow was playing. I was trying to service that melody of his, and trying to react and play what would make it come out. Just like you say, weaving it together. I wrote that tune right before the session.



AAJ: Thereâ€™s something very uneasy and hallucinatory about â€˜Operettaâ€ to me.

GB: In a different way from the other rubato piece?

AAJ: Yeah. Itâ€™s got a very beautiful melody--and it is a continuous melody, even if the first part is written and the rest works around improvisationally. Itâ€™s deeply melodic, but thereâ€™s some strangeness to it to me.

GB: Hallucinatory, huh. Well, the melody itself--for the session, I wanted to try some of the tunes I wrote for that previous session I did a week before. I wrote them a few weeks before that. I just sang them and wrote them down; I didnâ€™t go to the piano. Which was a new thing for me, and maybe thatâ€™s why--in a way, the whole project was trying to go beyond the instruments and go to the source of the music, to bring out the complete musical picture of the musician and what we could do together. Singing the melody, maybe, was way for me to get away from my instrument and tap that in a different way. So maybe when we played it, that was the point of departure; something that was not connected to the mechanics of the instrument, or, say, â€˜A-flat major,â€ which Iâ€™ve played a thousand times. It was more connected to that singing of the melody. And, you know, that tune is also kind of about my upbringing, because opera was a big part of my childhood. My first performances as a musician were in operas. My dad was a conductor and he used to put on operas in Michigan at the Mid-Michigan Opera Company. There was always a child part, so I was, like, the little boy who discovers the dead body [laughing].

AAJ: Must have been a drag when you grew out of those roles.

GB: It was. Adolescence--youâ€™re not the little boy, but you canâ€™t be the villain. So anyway, I was involved in that and I heard that music, so that tune tries to reconnect with that.

AAJ: I think thereâ€™s a rigorousness to your piano playing. A crispness and clarity to your articulation that gives your improvised phrases a certain authority and a composed quality--in addition to the imagination behind them.

GB: I donâ€™t think about articulation. I was never a successful classical musician; as much classical music as I heard, I never really learned to play any difficult repertoire. It was because I was too bored repeating the music over and over--I wanted to improvise, to do something else. So I never developed that kind of deliberate articulation. I



would say that that kind of articulation probably comes from playing tunes and standards and time and swing. Anything that grooves. I think it comes from the discipline of learning a discipline, like playing over changes and bebop. You have to be clear in your phrases; they have to have a beginning and an ending, they have to have a rhythmic variety--thereâ€™s a lot you can develop there. And maybe that gives my open playing that quality of composed intent. Like I said, my favorite free players went through that at some point. They went through the discipline of learning tunes and playing in time and over changes.



AAJ: One thing I like about this album is that everything on it seems perfectly placed. The sequencing of the tunes serves the music, or seems to. For example, â€œDovesâ€ could only be the album closer. That song also might be that Steinwayâ€™s greatest moment, but Moses is on a very high level on it, and Swallowâ€™s playing these low, long notes--the tuneâ€™s got real tension and release. Itâ€™s beautiful and ecstatic. But I can only imagine it at the end of the disc. Did you think much about the sequencing of the songs?

GB: Yes. I did, yeah. That brings up the point that the whole CD is definitely a composition in itself. The order of the tunes can bring that out. Just like the 20-minute tune is a trip that brings you somewhere--it goes through mystery, excitement and also moments of safety, of places to land. The order of tunes works the same way; itâ€™s got to have a momentum of its own. â€œDovesâ€ is actually another improvised piece. It was a coda to another tune that didnâ€™t make it on the record called â€œDucks and Gulls.â€

AAJ: Two of your three albums so far are trio sessions. Iâ€™m wondering if this is your ideal band configuration. Is this how you want to work now?

GB: Absolutely. I love trio. Itâ€™s the format that has always worked, and will always work, as long as thereâ€™s jazz. The piano trio will be important because itâ€™s the distillation of all these elements that you can reduce to the fewest denominators. The more people in a band, the harder it is to account for what everyone is doing--especially if you want to do collective playing. For me, itâ€™s more difficult to really tune in when thereâ€™s more people. But Iâ€™ve done a lot of solo playing; I love that. And I also have a quartet, the *Carpe Momentum* band. In that situation, I like to focus more on writing and itâ€™s a little more clear the way Iâ€™m trying to move the improvisation. A tune is more directed towards a certain context for improvising than in the trio, where itâ€™s easier to just let the music move organically. But I also play duo with Bob quite a bit, and that was a challenge and a rewarding experience for developing rubato playing. I suppose that the duo is even more distilled than the trio; is that too obvious to say?

AAJ: No, if anyone is saying obvious things here, itâ€™s not you. Speaking of tunes, weâ€™ve talked about improvising and rubato. But you write good plain old songs, like â€œBlink to Be,â€ â€œBig Bird,â€ â€œSerena al Telefono,â€ â€œSweet My Honey Sweet,â€ and â€œLook to the Lion,â€ which you did with the Either/Orchestra. Are you a prolific writer? Do you have a lot of unrecorded songs?

GB: I do. Basically, when I started playing jazz, I started writing right away. That was when I was about sixteen and for the next ten years, I spent most of my time writing. Then I realized I needed to figure out a way to play the tunes, to be better at playing them, at making them mine. So I spent the next ten years working on *playing*, becoming a better pianist. Not that I didnâ€™t compose. Iâ€™d compose if I had a session and wanted to write something for the session, but I didnâ€™t compose on a regular basis. I wrote about a hundred tunes in those ten years. You know, writingâ€™s a very unpredictable thing. you do it when you can, and if you have the time and inspiration, you might have two tunes in a week--and then not write anything for a while. Itâ€™s hard to control and fit into a schedule for me.

AAJ: Well, if it came too easily it would probably not be very good. A lot of formula.

GB: Yeah. Well, writing a melody is a combination of being spontaneous and very thoughtful. You have to be spontaneous to get that idea, that impulse--the melodyâ€™s got to captivate you right away so you want to keep working on it. I found that I had to write everything in one sitting. One or two at the most. Otherwise, it just became this weird, amorphous, tortured thing trying to find itself [laughing]. And I have a lot of tunes. I hope to record all of them, actually, and hope to write more too. But Iâ€™m happy now to have found a way to play them thatâ€™s more representative of me, that has a clear identity. I couldnâ€™t do that when I wrote them.

AAJ: You were in Russ Gershonâ€™s Either/Orchestra for over four years and only left the group recently. Thatâ€™s such a longstanding band, and so unique that I think it must have been interesting. I was just listening today to the new double-CD *Live in Addis*, which the band did in 2004 at the Ethiopian Music Festival. That trip the band took to Addis Ababa must have been amazing. Can you tell me about it and a little about your whole E/O experience?

GB: Sure. I love to talk about my trip to Ethiopia [laughing]. I mean, it was a totally life-changing experience. Itâ€™s something that I knew existed, but knew nothing about. So going there and discovering this incredible history and culture there, and then being able to study the music and play it with some Ethiopian musicians in Addis--they could never offer a package that good on any game show. It was the ultimate experience. Going to Ethiopia was sort of the culmination of my tenure in the Either/Orchestra. The personnel hadnâ€™t really changed in, like, five years, and the band was always very cohesive. Everyone got along remarkably, which is unusual for ten people. And with that trip, it was like everyone congealed into the Either/Orchestra band entity on a whole other level because the experience was so strong being over there.




Itâ€™s hard to say what stands out most from the Ethiopian trip because so many things were a shock. One was discovering the incredible history, another was seeing a Third World reality in person, another was collaborating with musicians from a whole other tradition. Itâ€™s hard to isolate something that really captures it. But Iâ€™d say it was the *band*; something transformed in the band, and when we came back, we had, to me, the most incredible gigs. We were just so on the same wavelength. It was really powerful. Iâ€™m really excited about that CD because it was music we had played for years in the band--not all of it, some of it--and itâ€™s very open. Itâ€™s the kind of thing where everyone is present in the music, all ten pieces, and you never get a sense that people are playing a secondary role.

AAJ: The band *kills* on that record. Itâ€™s the Either/Orchestra, itâ€™s a great ensemble, and everyone sounds great. But Rick McLaughlin, the bassist, is particularly fantastic. I always get pulled into his playing on the tracks.



GB: Rick is a fantastic bass player. Heâ€™s like Swallow, in a way, that heâ€™s very melodically oriented, does his role as a bassist so conscious of melody. We did a trio recording together with Jeremy Udden, who plays alto in the Either/Orchestra, which was a great project--kind of inspired by the Giuffrè trios. Thatâ€™s on Accurate Records. Itâ€™s Rickâ€™s CD. Russ [Gershon] has the magic ability of bringing everyoneâ€™s best out, and itâ€™s not an easy thing to do when youâ€™re balancing such diverse personalities and tastes in music and whatever with ten people. Moods. And he even had the nerve to bring an acoustic bass to Africa; traveling with an acoustic bass is a nightmare anywhere, and to bring it to Africa took nerve. It took nerve on Rickâ€™s part, too, obviously--and with the help of a few sedatives, he made it through the trip [laughing]. But the Either/Orchestra was a great experience for me musically because I was doing mostly straight-ahead

 gigs at that time and it was a good working space for me--a musical playground. Russ is really open, and I had to think of other ways to accompany people and ensemble playing. It was really challenging musically.

AAJ: You also played some electric piano with that band.

GB: Yeah, I played some Rhodes and Moog synthesizer. I enjoy playing those instruments. I wish I could do it more, but itâ€™s such a pain to move them around! The Rhodes in particular; sometimes I play with the Moog on the piano in a small group setting. I donâ€™t have anything against those instruments.

AAJ: You relocated to Rome pretty recently after some years in Boston. Although at times I think that Europeans support jazz more than we Americans do, I still have to ask how living in Rome is working out for you as a jazz pianist. Do you work a lot? Are there lots of musicians to play with?

GB: Rome is the jazz center of Italy for sure and there are a lot of musicians here. Because itâ€™s such a great country to be in, almost every jazz musician has spent quite a bit of time here. Chet Baker lived here for a while. So the musicians here have played with all the touring American musicians. Theyâ€™re very developed musically. Thereâ€™s the same thing going on here thatâ€™s going on elsewhere in that thereâ€™s a bebop revival, hard bop revival, thatâ€™s at the front of the music scene here. A couple, Stefano Di Battista and Flavio Boltro, have Blue Note recording contracts. Theyâ€™re great players. Italyâ€™s a country that has an incredible history and people are very fascinated by history and the past. Itâ€™s almost like the past validates the present, and thatâ€™s kind of reflected in the jazz scene at the moment. Part of that might just be economic reality as well, but thereâ€™s a lot of places to play. The mayor just opened up the Casa del Jazz, which is a state-sponsored place, a whole center. They have a library and auditorium, rooms for musicians, an outdoor park--itâ€™s unbelievable. And itâ€™s all for jazz! State-sponsored so they donâ€™t have to worry about filling seats. Iâ€™m sure they do on some level, but itâ€™s intended to be artistically motivated. So Rome, itâ€™s got its ups and downs; Iâ€™m still trying to figure it out. They say â€œwhen in Rome, do as the Romans do,â€ but Iâ€™m still trying to figure out how the Romans do it [laughing].

Visit [Greg Burk](#) on the web.

Selected Discography

Greg Burk Trio, [Nothing, Knowing](#) (482 Music, 2005)
 Either/Orchestra, [Ethiopiquest 20: Live in Addis](#) (Buda Musique, 2005)
 Greg Burk Quartet, [Carpe Momentum](#) (Soul Note, 2004)
 Rick DeMuzio, [First Offerings](#) (Independent, 2004)
 Either/Orchestra, [Neo-Modernism](#) (Accurate, 2003)
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